

Report

Lake Roosevelt National Recreation Area

■ 1.0 Site Description

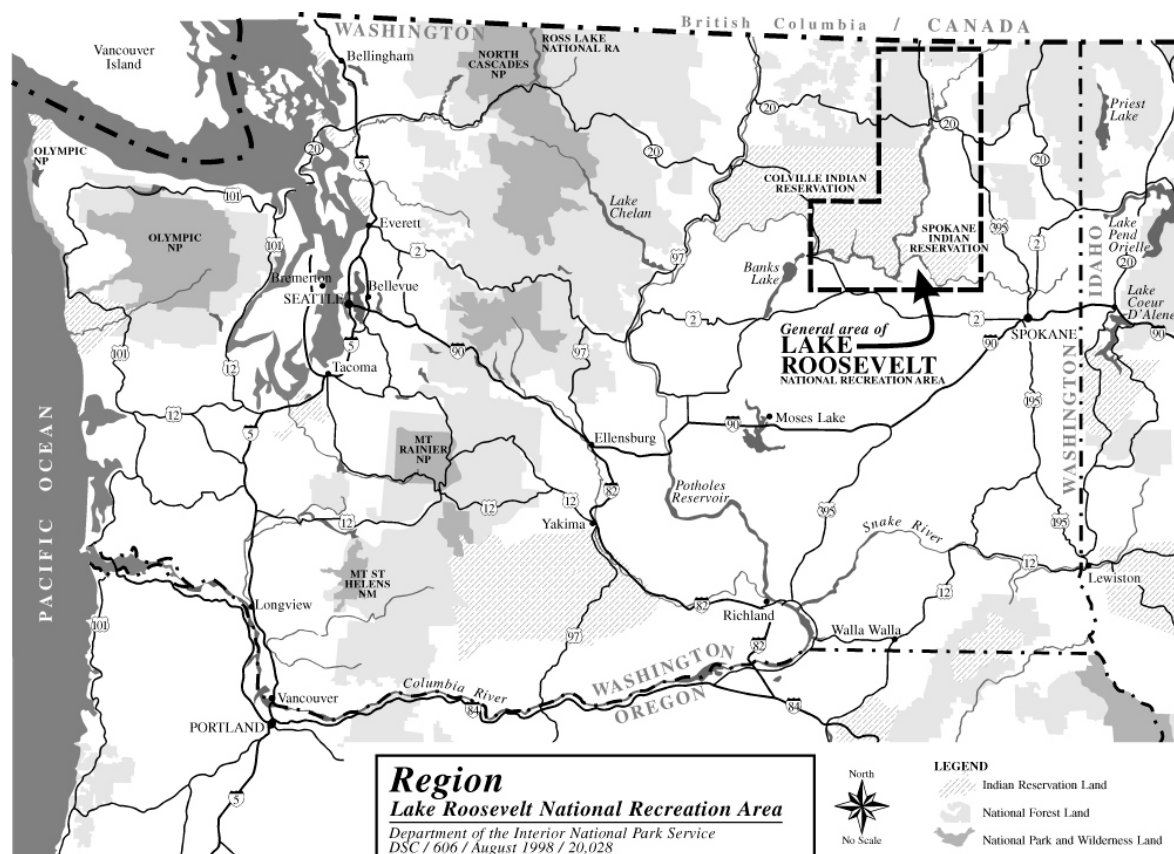
In 1941, damming of the Columbia River as part of the Columbia River Basin Project created a 130-mile-long lake in northeastern Washington State. The Coulee Dam National Recreation Area (NRA) was created in 1946; the name of this area was changed to the Lake Roosevelt NRA in 1996 to honor President Franklin D. Roosevelt, under whose administration Grand Coulee Dam was constructed (see Figure 1).

Currently, the NRA is administered under a cooperative agreement between the NPS, Bureau of Reclamation, Bureau of Indian Affairs, Colville Confederated Tribes, and the Spokane Tribe of Indians. This agreement, which was signed in 1990, gives the NPS responsibility for management of the recreation zone at Lake Roosevelt. The NPS must coordinate with the other partners, and all activities and areas remain subject to the Bureau of Reclamation's right to carry out the purposes of the Columbia Basin Project.

Lake Roosevelt NRA, at its closest point, is located about 50 miles northwest of Spokane, Washington (see Figure 2). The NRA extends 130 miles upstream from the Grand Coulee Dam on the Columbia River and includes an additional 20 miles of the Spokane River (see Figure 3). The NRA encompasses a relatively narrow ribbon of land along both rivers that varies in width from about 100 feet to one-half mile from the shoreline. The NRA includes about 312 miles of shoreline, 47,000 acres of water surface, and 13,000 acres of adjacent land.

Figure 1. Lake Roosevelt



Figure 2. General Location of Lake Roosevelt National Recreation Area

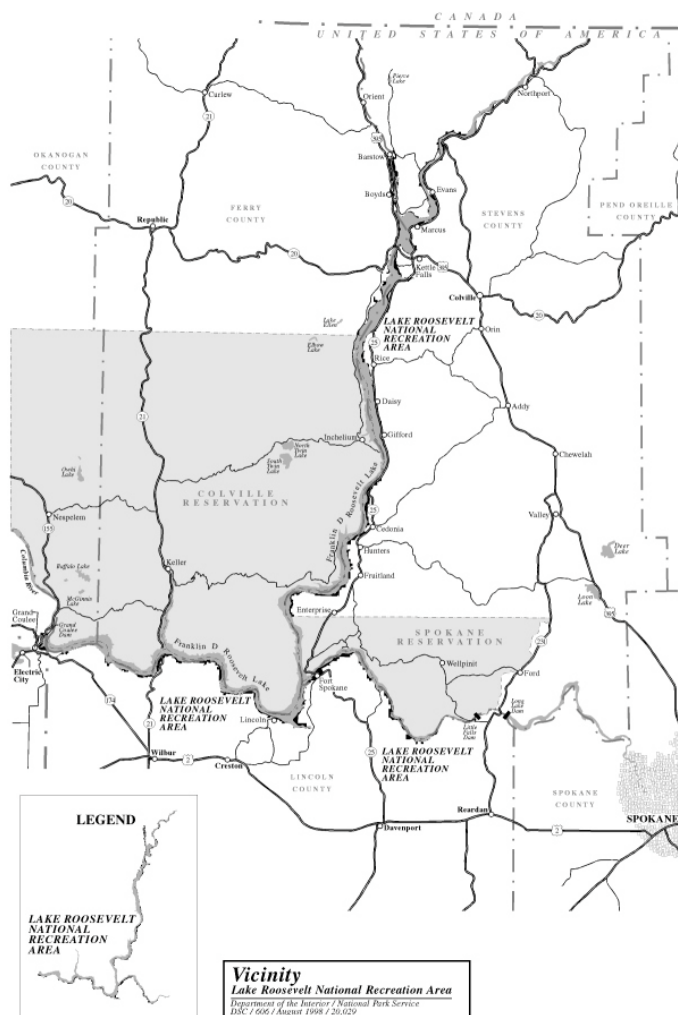
Activities at the NRA are oriented towards outdoor recreation with an emphasis on water-based recreation such as boating and fishing. The NRA operates 28 campgrounds and 22 boat launch facilities, most of which include additional day use and picnic areas. These facilities are spread along both the Columbia and Spokane Rivers. NRA-sponsored concession facilities are also operated at Spring Canyon, Seven Bays, Kettle Falls, and Keller Ferry. The latter two concession operations include houseboat rentals. The NRA operates formal visitor centers at Fort Spokane and Kettle Falls. Visitor contact “staging areas” are also operated on an informal basis at 12 to 13 campgrounds during peak visitation times.

There are also a host of privately operated camping, lodging, service, and retail facilities throughout the area that are oriented to visitors of the NRA. These private facilities tend to be clustered in the gateway communities of Grand Coulee to the west, Fort Spokane and Davenport to the southeast, and Kettle Falls and Colville to the north.

The most popular water-based activities including motorboating, water-skiing, sailing, swimming, and fishing. Land-based activities include camping, hiking, picnicking, wild-life watching, and sightseeing. In the past, these activities could be found at other regional parks in the area. However, Lake Roosevelt is one of the few large lakes in northeastern Washington that continues to have an abundance of shoreline that is available to the general public for recreation.

NRA operations are split between two districts, each of which receives approximately an equal number of visitors. In the North District, visitor activities tend to center on river access. Once visitors reach their primary destination in the North District, they tend not to do much additional traveling. Activities in the North District are heavily concentrated at Kettle Falls, which accounts for over one-half of all recreation visits in the district.

Figure 3. Immediate Vicinity of Lake Roosevelt National Recreation Area



In the South District, the Grand Coulee Dam tends to be the major visitor attraction. Visitor activities tend to be more evenly spread between sites in the South District, and there also tends to be more vehicle travel between sites. In both districts, on-site travel tends to involve access to either services (e.g., groceries, fuel, etc.) or visitor information. NRA staff indicated that visitors tend not to visit multiple recreation areas or districts on the same trip.

Visitation at the park can fluctuate widely between years based on reservoir drawdown. The general trend is upward, with visitation growing from 500,000 visits and 30,000 boat launches in 1985 to 1.4 million visits and 70,000 boat launches in 1998. The 1998 figure

includes about 140,000 overnight stays in the NRA. While June through September are the busiest months, accounting for three-fourths of annual visitation, this pattern can also vary if river levels drop and the boat launches are inaccessible. April and early May, which correspond with low-water times, are also the low point for annual NRA visitation. Water levels on Lake Roosevelt are affected by a priority of uses for Grand Coulee Dam that are defined by statute; these priorities are: 1) flood control; 2) fish mitigation; 3) hydroelectric power generation; and 4) recreation.

Visitors were characterized as “independent” and very familiar with recreation opportunities in the NRA. Repeat visitation accounts for one-half of all visits, on average. Visitors tend to arrive in small to medium-sized groups of families and extended families. Accordingly, there is no “typical” age pattern, with one-quarter of visitors under the age of 14. The average visit at the NRA is about 24 hours, and hence involves an overnight stay.

Lake Roosevelt NRA participates in the NPS’s fee demonstration program. While there are no fees for traveling through the NRA, activities such as camping and boat launching require fee payments. Funding increases at the NRA that have accompanied the demonstration program have allowed more money to be committed to facility maintenance in recent years. With recent completion of a new General Management Plan (GMP), the NRA plans to continue improving existing areas in the near term rather than develop new recreation areas.

The new GMP did not include any specific forecasts of future visitation growth. Due to the impact of external factors, primarily river-level fluctuations, the GMP analyzed alternatives using annual growth rates that ranged from a one percent decrease to a seven percent increase. Since the preferred strategy in the GMP emphasizes improvements to existing facilities and areas, NRA staff expects that visitation patterns may become more geographically dispersed in both districts.

■ 2.0 Existing Transportation Services

NRA staff indicated that nearly all visitors arrive via private vehicle; this pattern corresponds with the nature of recreation activities at the NRA. At its closest points, the NRA is about one hour from Spokane and four hours from the Puget Sound Area. A 1998 traffic study for the NRA indicated that over 95 percent of vehicles at the NRA during peak season were from Washington State, with most of the rest from Oregon and Idaho. The Spokane area accounted for over one-fourth of vehicles, and other local communities near the NRA accounted for about 10 percent of the total. The remainder of the vehicles were from widely dispersed communities throughout the state.

The primary east-west route through Washington connecting Spokane and Seattle is Interstate 90, which is about 50 miles south of the NRA. The primary east-west route serving the NRA is U.S. 2, which connects Spokane, Davenport, and Coulee City to points west. State Route 20 is the primary east-west access route for the northern portion of the

NRA. These routes guide NRA visitors through the gateway communities such as Fort Spokane and Kettle Falls, which were characterized as very busy on summer weekends.

Site access is predominately by individual families, many of which tow a boat or camper. There are very few tour groups or tour buses that are destined to the NRA; most of the tour buses that pass through the area are destined to a nearby casino. The traffic report noted that about 90 percent of vehicles on NRA access roads are private autos, six percent are recreation vehicles (RVs), and less than two percent are trucks and buses. Over 20 percent of all vehicles were towing another vehicle; 90 percent of these towed vehicles were boats.

Overall, there is no congestion problem on state or local roadways through the NRA. Parking areas throughout the NRA were also characterized as mostly adequate. However, parking problems are known to arise on weekend days near major boat launches. The 1998 traffic report noted weekend parking capacity problems at boating and camping areas near Kettle Falls, Fort Spokane, Porcupine Bay, Keller Ferry and Hunters. This problem stems, in part, from the large number of RVs and boats in the area, a tendency for people to park for long periods of time at camping and boating areas, and the preponderance of larger family groups that bring multiple vehicles.

■ 3.0 ATS Needs

At this time, NRA staff does not foresee any near-term or long-term needs for Alternative Transportation Systems (ATS) or services. The primary recreation activities at the NRA, including boating, camping, picnicking and hiking, rely to a very large extent on an ability to use private automobiles. Even road-affiliated ATS facilities such as bicycle lanes are not in great demand since bicycling is not one of the top activities at the NRA. NRA staff does not expect that visitors would be interested in shuttle-type operations, even water-based operations, and these issues were never mentioned during the recent GMP process.

■ 4.0 Basis of ATS Needs

Lake Roosevelt NRA spans a very large area (about two miles in width and 150 miles in length) in northeastern Washington. Visitor activities and facilities are spread throughout this large area. While a few locations such as Kettle Falls and Fort Spokane receive heavy usage, visitors tend to disperse to facilities throughout the NRA. This type of widely dispersed usage pattern is generally not conducive to a visitor shuttle system.

Most NRA visitors arrive in family groups. The recent traffic study also indicated that about ¼ of vehicles at the NRA are either RVs or towing a boat or camper. Also, visitors arrive from locations throughout Washington State, without any predominate origin location. These access characteristics do not lend themselves well to an external shuttle system.

The typical visitation pattern at the NRA is for an individual or group to do very little traveling once they reach their destination location (e.g., campground or boat launch) in the NRA. Activities at Lake Roosevelt NRA are oriented towards water-based recreation, while land activities focus on camping, picnicking and hiking. The biggest component of on-site travel for these visitors is in moving between campgrounds and boat launches. Furthermore, water activities are oriented towards recreation rather than travel and transportation. These usage characteristics suggest that there is very little demand for on-site travel and transportation, including travel by personal vehicle, once someone reaches the NRA.

■ 5.0 Bibliography

Draft General Management Plan/Environmental Impact Statement. Lake Roosevelt National Recreation Area, 1998.

Traffic Report. Lake Roosevelt National Recreation Area, November 1998.

■ 6.0 Persons Interviewed

Tom Streiffert, Professional Services Team Leader

Dan Hand, Chief of Interpretation

Ray Dashall, Acting Facilities Manager